The Detective and the Writer: The Postmodernist Re-Writing of Detective Fiction Conventions in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*

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Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the application and subsequent subversion of the generic conventions of detective narrative in the Metaphysical Detective novel with particular reference to the first novel, *City of Glass*, in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1990) which is exemplary work of this postmodernist subgenre. In addition to identifying these generic conventions and what happens to them the paper also seeks to pins point the specific postmodernist textual tactics and strategies that Auster, and other practitioners of the subgenre, employ in their subversion of the detective to explore such metaphysical issues as identity, reality, and the nature of authorship.

المحقق والكاتب: ما بعد البنيوية واعادة كتابة تقاليد الرواية البوليسية في رواية *مدينة الزجاج* للكاتب بول اوستير

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المستخلص

يهدف هذا البحث الى استقصاء كيفية استخدام تقاليد نمط السرديات البوليسية في الرواية البوليسية الماورائية في فترة ما بعد الحداثة مع الاشارة بصورة خاصة الى مدينة الزجاج وهي اولى روايات ثلاثية نيويورك للكاتب بول اوستير(1990). يحاول البحث ايضا تشخيص لاليات والاستراتيجيات النصية ما بعد الحداثوية التي استخدمها اوستير وغيرة ممن كتبوا في هذا النمط الروائي لغرض استجلاء عدد من المسائل الماورائية مثل الهوية والواقع وطبيعة التاليف.

Despite its tendency to problematize or collapse generic boundaries postmodern fiction has inevitably favored some genres over others. Popular narrative genres, like detective fiction and science fiction, are the focus of this tendency as a consequence of postmodernism's challenge to the modernist notion of the canon and canonical works and authors. The formulas and generic conventions of these genres are not used "straight" by postmodern novelists but adapted and subverted to create new and innovative paradigms of meanings. Detective fiction is probably the most favored among the postmodern novelists as it yields itself easily to the ends of the postmodernist textual pursuit.

Although postmodern detective novels can be situated in the tradition of the twentieth-century American hard-boiled detective novel, they constitute a unique subgenre within this broader category which is variously called "metaphysical detective novel,"1 “postmodernist detective fiction”2, or “a meta-anti-detective story”3. This type of postmodernist fiction is defined by Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney in their collection *Detecting Texts* as "a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective-story conventions – such as narrative closure and the detective’s role as surrogate reader –with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot."4 They further explain that all metaphysical detective stories have characteristic themes which can be grouped under a) the defeated detective figure, b) the labyrinthine world and text, c) the “embedded text” d) the meaninglessness of clues, e) double, lost، stolen or exchanged identities, and f) resistance to closure (8). On one hand, the reader confronts a familiar framework with the structure of a detective story and on the other hand the authors achieve their purpose in digressions without being obscure.5

This postmodern subgenre which was shaped by a number of contemporary novelists from Borges to Pynchon, Nabokov and Auster exhibits the following characteristics:

Transmutation of the traditional detective's quest into something more elusive and complex. In it, the relatively straightforward business of identifying a guilty person, bringing him or her to justice, and restoring social order is ineluctably subverted into a larger and more ambiguous affair. The identity in question becomes as often as not the detective's own, and justice and order dissolve into chimeras in a struggle with a reality that has become increasingly ungraspable.6

In this postmodernist version of the detective genre there is a marked absence of the final working out of the initial puzzle characteristic of the classic detective fiction. The reader is left with what Stefano Tani in *The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian Fiction* describes as "the decentering and chaotic admission of mystery, of non-solution."7 This is radically different from the classic detective fiction which is built of a progression towards closure in the form of the resolution of an enigma. Postmodern detective novels are, in contrast, anti-closure in that they are designed to leave their narratives, not only open-ended, but quite ambivalent. This has to do with the principle of saturation of readers's expectations in the classic detective fiction. Postmodern detective novels never allow such saturation as readership is deeply grounded in the experiential structure of the detective subtext in such novels.

Tani, moreover, suggests that the American hard-boiled genre in particular provided the groundwork for the use of detective fiction conventions by postmodern writers. Such writers interweave their narratives with contentional clues in such a way as to mislead the reader intentionally, so that ‘‘conventions are paradoxically functional in the disintegration of the genre.’’8 The detective in the postmodern detective story ‘‘no longer has the detachment of a M. Dupin.’’9 The reference to Edgar Allen Poe's detective stories in this quotation is quite functional as the postmodern novelists uses and subverts the detective formulas established by Poe in their detective narratives.

Critical consensus credits Edgar Allan Poe with the invention of the hard-boiled detective story with the publication of ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ in 1841. The critic Lary N. Landrum argues that Poe’s detective stories are subversive of the conventions of the canonical works of the founder of classic

detective fiction Agatha Christie or Arthur Conan Doyle. Poe's detective stories are highly problematic as they put the conventions of classic British fiction to subversive ends. For instance, there is no culprit in the traditional sense of the word in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ since the murderer’s creativity is morally neutral. While in ‘Ligeia’ the reader is presented with a ‘false’ solution, and in ‘William Wilson’ the solution destroys the solver. The unsolved narrative mystery of ‘The Purloined Letter’ is further proof that the detective genre was not, in its birth, a representation of a simple world in which good and evil, reason and unreason, truth and lies were clearly defined. These binaries are deconstructed and suspended to allow for a degree metaphysical, and presumably anti-detective, perspective in the detective narrative. The moral and narrative ambiguity of Poe’s stories suggests that Poe violated the very principles he created. Although these anomalies were ironed out in traditional mystery novels, they survive in the hard-boiled tradition to which postmodern detective novel is closer.10

One important trace of Poe in the postmodern detective novel is the ambivalent nature of the figure of the detective. Instead of applying his intellects and sharp observation powers to detect the clues and solve the mystery as in classic detective stories the postmodern detective ‘‘gets emotionally caught in the net of his detecting effort and is torn apart between the upsurge of feelings and the necessity for rationality.’’11 He is caught in a stasis that dislocates his sense of identity and being as well. Postmodern novelists advanced three solutions or compromises, according to Tani, for this stasis. The first is *innovation*, which provides a partially satisfying solution, based in a ‘‘social preoccupation … totally foreign to the ‘British’ kind, but is already present in the hard-boiled school,’’ which uses variants of rules. Conventions are ‘‘twisted but not subverted’’ in this mode of textual appropriation. 12 Second, *deconstruction* which is a strategy that suspends the solution (as in Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, 1966) or supplies a mocking solution, as in William Hjortsberg’s *Falling Angel* (1978). Crime is ‘‘seen as a secret organization ruling or perverting society’’ that provides the occasion for an existential quest. 13 Finally, *metafiction* which initiates a ‘‘ ‘bookconsciousness-of-its-bookishness,’ ’’ which is like British puzzle detection.14 This mode of postmodern textual appropriation of established generic conventions, however, is only generally related to the case of detective fiction.

Postmodern novelists create a metaphysical dimension in their detective narrative by choosing not to choose to seek a solution. They often employ such mythological elements as mirror, labyrinth, and map to establish signifying paradigms of meaning in their narratives.15 The detective is a mapmaker (he seeks a solution); present time is the mirror maker; flowing time (the past) is the labyrinth maker, that is, the source of mystery, or crime. The detective follows an Ariadne’s thread (a lead). The mirror is also a prefiguration of the double and also deceives the detective. Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49:

Disappoints the reader’s expectations and ‘deconstructs’ conventional detective fiction by denying its main characteristics: the denouement, the consequent triumph of justice, the detective’s detachment (Oedipa goes as far as questioning her own sanity). The tension between the reader and the novel—namely, the tension from detection to solution—is increased in comparison with traditional detective fiction, since inconsequential clues are often much more tantalizing than the ones which eventually fall neatly into place. 16

The Crying of Lot 49 is an exemplary novel of the postmodern detective novel, that collectively inverts the process of detection away from the challenge of solving the mystery. Pynchon's novel adopts the strategy of creating suspense by an over-richness of clues leading nowhere and by the interplay between the novel and the Jacobean revenge play [*The Courier’s Tragedy*] in the novel.’’17 Oedipa, the work's detective, strives to reach a middle choice, to break down the binary oppositions that shape here fictive world: either/or, saved/damned alternatives that the four possibilities give her, but, ultimately, she grows to maturity because she cannot reach a middle choice.’’ Pynchon fails to humanize her beyond concepts and abstractions. She is no longer that human detective figure but a point of consciousness projecting the metaphysics of strange phenomenological existence. Thus, ’’ at one point Oedipa says she was an ‘‘optimistic baby [who] had come on so like the private eye in any long-ago

radio drama, believing all you needed was grit, resourcefulness, exemption from hide-bound cops' rules, to solve any great mystery.''18

The metamorphosis of the detective into a postmodern subject is probably best illustrated in the novels of Paul Auster (1947-) who has brought the postmodernist revision of the conventions of the detective genre to new frontiers. He applies the techniques and strategies of intertextuality and metafiction that are associated with postmodernism to revise and redirect the conventions of detective fiction in such a way to produce deep-sighted explorations of the issues of writing, authorship, and identity. His New York Trilogy is, by now, one of the classics of this type of postmodern writing.

First published as one work in 1987, *The New York Trilogy* was originally published as three books: *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986) and *The Locked Room* (1986). The New York Trilogy has probably been entitled that way because the three stories take place in New York City. Although the stories are not related to each other, the word "trilogy" brings the stories together by imposing a an interpretative pattern on the thematic bulk and narrative flow of the three novels. Indeed, they are different stories with different characters, but their themes are shared, which means that in essence it is one story in three different disguises. In each case, the conventions of the traditional detective novel are being observed and overthrown. Auster uses the traditional narrative structures of the detective novel to explore issues of identity, reality and writing, rather than to simply solve a criminal case. Auster's dislocation of the detective conventions results from a hybridization of the politics of postmodernism with the established conventions of the detective fiction genre. The critic Stefen E. Alford highlights the hybrid nature of the Trilogy when he states that:

The New York Trilogy is nominally a collection of detective stories that, within the generic constraints of detective fiction engage in a series of self-oriented metaphysical explorations. These tales could be characterized accurately as postmodern, in that they employ a pop culture form to reflect on issues more profound than "whodunit." 19

Although many of the conventional features of detective fiction are present in *The New York Trilogy* such as a crime, a detective, an investigation, they are structured in such a way as to subvert the detective ' s investigation away from the traditional concerns of crime toward a metaphysical exploration into the nature of identity, language, and literature itself. Such textual inversions take place mostly when " the detective, the high priest of logic, in his attempt to locate missing persons becomes himself the missing person."20

Furthermore, the critic Mark Brown traces the metaphysical perspectives of the narratives of the Trilogy back to one archetypal Ur-text. He believes that each of the three novels in the Trilogy is structured loosely around Nathaniel Hawthorne ' s story, " Wakefield, " which is about a man who disguises himself and takes lodgings near his home to watch over his wife. He finds his new identity interesting and remains unrecognized for twenty years. Later Wakefield returns to his house on a whim, and here the story ends. Similarly, the fate of the central characters in the *Trilogy* is to become, like Wakefield, an " Outcast of the Universe."21 Through the characteristically detective motif of the missing person and the traditions of the detective form, each of the three novels explores the unstable nature of identity for its central detective character. Quinn, a writer of popular detective novels in City of Glass, takes on the Stillman case, out of curiosity, when he receives a couple of phone calls meant for a detective called Paul Auster. His sense of identity is already obscured in a triad of selves which is unconventionally dominated by his literary pseudonym, William Wilson, and the fictional detective character in his novels, Max Work, whom he tries to assume when working on the Stillmann case. The issue of identity is further complicated by the addition of a " Paul Auster " character in the story who is biographically identical to the author.22

The same polemic of identity is further developed in the second novel of the Trilogy, *Ghosts*. The detective Blue, who is hired by a man named White to watch over another man named Black undergoes an identity crisis similar to that of Quinn in City of Glass. Blue enters an ontological struggle with language while confined to his room watching Black across the street. When he sits down to write his

report, Blue finds " that words … obscure the things that they are trying to say."23 The unnamed narrator in *The Locked Room*, brings the metaphysics of identity to a full culmination. His identity becomes subsumed by that of his missing author friend when he marries Fanshawe ' s wife and becomes a father to his son. However, this process of self-fashioning soon comes to a full erosion when Fanshawe finally provides a red notebook to explain his actions. Self-erosion amounts when the narrator finds that " [e]ach sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible, " creating mystery rather than providing resolution (*The Locked Room*:314).

Auster employs the textual tactics of shifting narration and the dis-unity of authorship to disorient the reader's experiences. Such sense of disorientation is crucial for the textual exploration of the identity metaphysics. Such exploration is further materialized through the relative rigidities of the conventions of detective fiction. Auster himself is speaking to this effect when he has pointed out that he is using the traditions of detective fiction " to get to another place … altogether. "24 Thus, by subverting the generic conventions of the crime, the detective, and the investigation, common to the genre of detective fiction, the 'other place' that Auster gets to is the metaphysical struggle with the logos of language and the struggle to identify not the criminal, but the nature of identity and selfhood itself.

The New York Trilogy, then, takes the form of a postmodernist rewrite of the detective novel. The resulting form is a metamorphosis of the highly formulaic form of the detective fiction genre. Such form is intended to mirror the chaotic flow of contemporary life. Daniel Quinn, the protagonist of *City of Glass*, writes detective novels using the pseudonym William Wilson. The choice of names is deliberate and serves to ground Auster's narrative in the mainstream of the detective fiction tradition which begins with Poe and culminates with the great noir hard-boiled stories of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler.

Yet, this is not to suggest that *The New York Trilogy* is a traditional hard-boiled novel. The most striking of these elements is that while detective novels generally deal with the search for answers, and for truth, Auster's trilogy effaces any possibility of closure. The critic William G. Little puts this line of demarcation more eloquently when he states that that "while the goal of detection is to uncover the whole story, in Auster's work, nothing, especially not nothing, is grasped in its all. No case is closed…his calculations and representations lead to no final illumination, no climatic discovery."25 In Raymond Chandler's novels, for instance, it is inevitable that Marlowe, the serial detective, will solve the mystery, that he will find the answers that he seeks. In *The Big Sleep*, for example, Marlowe solves the case of General Sternwood's blackmailing and in *The Long Goodbye* he discovers the truth about Terry Lennox and his disappearance.

Detectives in Auster's Trilogy are denied the privilege of having such answers. As Paul Auster himself puts it in an interview with Larry MaCaffery and Sinda Gregory , "Mystery novels give answers, my work is about asking questions."26 Auster, here, reflects on the pluralistic potential of the detective text as a postmodern phenomenon. Being postmodern means a multiplicity of voices and a textual decentrality that opens the detection narrative to countless number of interpretive possibilities. In *City of Glass*, for example, Quinn never really solves the case he takes on. His method of detection seems flawed, if not awkward. This is clear, for example, in the case of the arbitrary decision he takes over which Peter Stillman to follow and the resolution of the case is not down to him. Peter Stillman's suicide and Virginia and Peter moving away have little to do with Quinn's detective work. The end of the story certainly does not give answers, as Quinn disappears enigmatically and the identity of the narrator remains a mystery.

The same is true with *Ghosts* where the reader never really discovers the identity of Blue's employer, whether it is indeed Black or it is somebody else. Blue's narrative is similarly denied any closure for where Blue goes at the end of the story is similarly uncertain. The narrator simply tells the reader: "where he went after that is not important...from this moment on we know nothing." (pp. 195-196) Similarly, Ambivalence reigns over *The Locked Room*. When the narrator discovers that Fanshaw is alive he is left behind a closed door. The mystery deepens when the narrator finally destroys the latter's work, which forms the crux of the novel. The reader's expectations are never satirized as the

narrative resists closure. The text is silent over what shall happen as a consequence to the act of destroying the manuscripts of Fanshaw.

This sense of anti-closure that informs Auster's work is a deliberate destruction of the form of the classic detective fiction as the critic John Mennick suggested when he comments on the novels forming *The New York Trilogy* saying that “these novels undermine the form of the detective story itself, its rationality, its clear morality.”27 While classic detective fiction seeks to restore order to its disturbed fictive world by solving the mystery, Auster's seeks no such aim. It outsets the mystery to the periphery of the text turning the process of detection into an exploration of phenomenological issues of identity, being and the very act of writing. Although such explorations can be labeled metaphysical, they remain amoral in the sense that they lack the good vs. evil vision characteristic of the classic detective novels. The simple cause and effect rationality of the genre in consequence is displaced by a more complex and internalized mode of justification. Clues and signs are never important as they used to be as leads to solve the mystery in the classic detective fiction. They are staples of the metaphysical meditations of the working of language and textuality in the creation of subjectivity and the sense of selfhood.

Moreover, detectives in Auster's *The New York Trilogy* show non of the self-confidence and fearlessness characteristic of the detectives in the classic American detective fiction. Unlike Chandler's Marlowe, who practice his tricks of crafts quite naturally as if his detective job is a natural extension of his identity, Quinn forces himself to do the detective role. This is what actually Auster notices about Quinn in *City of Glass* when he states that "the very things that caused problems for Quinn, work took for granted." (city of Glass:9) Quinn even lacks the necessary qualification of a real detective like the ability of facing unexpected situations and the sharpe eye for details. When he calls for the first time on the Stillmans he is thrown off guard when Virginia Stillman opens the door to him. He does not expected a woman and behaves awakwardly. He couldn't focus on the details of his surroundings: "already, things were happening to fast...even in those first moments he had lost ground, was starting to fall behind himself." (City of Glass:13) He is not a real detective as he is trying to imitate the fictional detective Max Work in his own novels.

Similarly, the narrator of *The Locked Room* shares Quinn's lack of confidence in his detective abilities. He spends his entire life in the shadows of Fanshaw which accounts for his lack of the poise and talents of the real detective. So, he never towers over others but is being shadowed by them. He himself expresses this fact when he says: “I do not think I was comfortable in his presence. if envy is too strong a word for what I was trying to say, then I would call it a suspicion, a secret feeling that Fanshawe was somehow better than I was.” (*The Locked Room*:209)

Auster's detectives, as such, are more thinkers and philosophers that detectives. They don't have real mysteries to solve and when they try to do so they get lost in the abyss of reality and illusion. Their detective narratives in each of the three novels of the trilogy resist interpretations and closure as well. This leaves the reader nowhere if h\she applies or promote his\her expectations around the conventional core of the detective genre. The non-cases they get involved in becomes a window on a new reality via questioning the human logic of the world they construct through perception and reasoning.

What Auster actually retains from the detective genre conventions is their potential as “ready-made forms, ideal for postmodern miscegenation.”28 This process of 'miscegenation' is essentially a process of textual deconstruction of the formal properties of the detective genre which ends in the ultimate appropriation of the genre itself. This is evident, for instance, in *City of Glass*, which, by critical consensus, is esteemed the most "canonized" postmodern detective novel. The critic John Scaggs, on the one hand, states that Auster's *City of Glass* "appropriates and deconstructs the detective fiction genre, and in so doing displays most of the characteristics of the metaphysical detective story.”29 The conventions of the detective genre in the textual paradigm of such metaphysical detective novel as City of Glass are employed and subverted to refashion the detective quest into a quest for identity and an inquiry into the metaphysics of the self and being.

The critic William Lavender, on the other hand, identifies a re-writing process instead of deconstruction to be operative in *City of Glass*. This textual re-writing of the formal properties of the classic detective is locus of the novel's postmodernity. genre. Lavender finds that Auster’s *City of Glass*

shares a lot with the tradition of the popular form of the twentieth-century detective novel. “Its protagonist," says Lavender, "plays the role of a detective, takes a case, and embarks upon a program of surveillance and decipherment to solve a mystery.”30 But in spite of this clear adherence to form, Auster ends up taking the detective genre in a fundamentally different direction which is that of self-reflexive narrativity. He uses the conventions of this formulaic genre to achieve a level of self-reflection which ironizes the genre to some degree. Alison Russell in “Deconstructing *The New York Trilogy*: Paul Auster’s Anti-Detective Fiction” calls *City of Glass* “anti-detective fiction,” placing emphasis on Auster’s “parodic forms and subversions of the enddominated detective story.”31 The employment of such postmodernist tactics as the presentation of instability, the asking instead of answering of questions, and the lack of closure in an “anti-detective” text like *City of Glass* is representative of the postmodern crisis of meaning and subjectivity that extends from a failure of language that Auster’s narrator describes to the very shaking of generic boundaries.

Auster uses parody, metafictionality , intertextuality and self-reflexivity, which are the essential features of the postmodern novel, to deconstructs the conventional elements of the detective story in such a way as to “posit," according to Lavender, " the detective novel as an allegory for novels in general and then uses it to examine the possibilities of the form.”32 In this, Auster constructs a special type of narrative structure incorporating a reflexive point of view, plot as an enigma resisting closure, and characters with multiple identities\double selves to create a new paradigms of significance in his narrative. Paul Auster manipulates the parodic potential of hyperbole in *City of Glass* to overload the detective genre conventions and thereby to interpolate his idea of uncertainty and the possibilities of the human subject by playing on the reader's newly generated self-conscious relation to the conventions of the genre. This new perception of the expected is really a liberating experience for the reader as opens new horizons to his perception of reality and self.

However, *City of Glass* as detective fiction is highly selective in its use of the conventions of the genre. Although Auster uses many conventions of detective and mystery fiction, he disregards others. Among the three basic conventions of this genre, an amateur private investigator, a potential crime, and the discovery of clues, *City of Glass* features a mystery and a detective only. However, it does not adhere to the generic conventions and expectations for the classic detective-hero. Quinn is not a detective. He is a writer of popular detective fiction and is hired under false pretenses as the Stillmans believe he is Paul Auster, a private investigator, to prevent Peter Stillman, Jr., from being murdered by his lunatic father Peter Stillman, Sr. Although he pursues Stillman through the streets of New York, assumes different roles to obtain information, Quinn is never a real detective. He shows non of the heroic stature and daring actions of the detective figure of the classic hard-boiled detective fiction. He is really anti-heroic, permenatly caught in a state of self-erosion.

This results from the high sense of ambiguity that Auster incepts in his detective figure in the form of the double. The doublegangger has long been used in world fiction as a means to psychoanalyze the problematics of identity and selfhood by utilizing the mirror stage and the split-identity or what is commonly referred to as schizoanalysis. Auster utilizes this phenomenon several time in his narrative. Daniel Quinn creates and is doubled with his own fictional character, Max Work, a “private-eye narrator” (City of Glass: 6). Quinn starts losing his grip on reality as the fictional character of his stories comes more and more real. He, therefore, begins to think and behave like Max Work and ultimately “stopped thinking on himself as real”(*City of Glass*: 10). Identity-switching becomes a mode of existence for Quinn: “The more Quinn seemed to vanish, the more persistent Work’s presence in that world became” (*City of Glass*: 10).

Commenting upon Quinn's adoption of the personae of Wilson and Work the critic Brendan Martin argues that the detective's "sense of identity is doubly compromised."33 Martin explains that:

As Quinn moves from one adopted role to another, he strives to counteract his sense of powerlessness and ineptitude. Quinn’s existence, however, like that of his fictional counterparts, becomes determined solely by the confines of the literary form.34

Indeed, the formal conventions of the detective genre mirror the sense of dislocation that Quinn experiences as a postmodern subject. So when Quinn states the reasons that he writes detective novels, he inadvertently comments upon his own sense of atrophy. What he liked about detective novels is:

Their sense of plenitude and economy. In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so—which amounts to the same thing. The world of the book comes to life, seething with possibilities, with secrets and contradictions…. Everything becomes essence; the center of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The center, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end.(*City of Glass*:8)

Quinn seems to crave after whet the detective novel possesses or fashions in its characters. He lacks the rational coherence and the centrality of the self that the detectives of the classic detective fiction are blessed with. The detective figure is a centre of meaning in the novel and his quest for solutions impose order and rationality on the chaos of his world. This is why he identifies with and impersonates the detective characters of his own novels.

However, the interplay of doubles, and identities culminates when Quinn receives, quite accidentally, the phone calls, meant for the private detective Paul Auster. He decides to impersonate the latter out of curiosity and boredom. He, then, works on the case of Peter Stillman, a young man, who feels threatened by his father, recently released from prison. The boundaries between the fictional and the real world become blurred, when Quinn tries to locate Peter Stillman Sr. at the railway station. Suddenly, another similar man appears, and Quinn cannot decide between the two Stillmans, he cannot say whether it is an illusion or not. He is hesitating, likely to split his personality into two distinct parts, to follow both of them. Finally he chooses "this shabby creature, so broken down and disconnected from his surroundings"(*City of Glass*: 68) convinced that he must be the "mad Stillman"(*City of Glass*: 68). He chooses him, because he resembles Quinn very much, representing the same isolation, the same madness. Quinn becomes obsessed by Stillman, he follows the old man, not because this is his duty, but because his interest in him deepens day by day: "He had lived Stillman's life, walked at his place, seen what he had seen" (*City of Glass*: 80). The double, then, constitutes a textual space which operates to blur the line of demarcation between reality and fiction. Such a space would be highly functional in problematizing the fixity of the generic conventions of the detective genre as a preliminary stage in the process of their textual interpellation.

This is largely due to Auster's conceptualization of the writer as detective throughout the Trilogy. Auster, however, tries to mediates between his writer-character and the detective role he seeks to assume in the novel. Quinn's main argument for his role-switching between writer and detective is that " the writer and the detective are interchangeable." (City of Glass:8) For both assume the same functions and roles in relation to the reader. Like the writer:

The detective is one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them…. The reader sees the world through the detective's eyes, experiencing the proliferation of its details as if for the first time. He has become awake to the things around him, as if they might speak to him, as if, because of the attentiveness he now brings to them, they might begin to carry a meaning other than the simple fact of their existence. Private eye. (*City of Glass*:8)

Such is the plurality of the detective figure in *City of Glass* that allow for a questioning of the metaphysical concepts of the self, identity, and being through the agency of the metaphor of detection and the figure fulfilling it.

However, *City of Glass* exhibits more than one author-detective characters beside Quinn such as Stillman, Auster and the narrator. Yet, what distinguishes this novel from other works with similar author-detective characters is that its " author-characters who take on the role of detective are forced to

radically revise their understanding of both authorship and detection."35 Traditional English and American novels have always featured detectives writing about their adventures and visa versa but never with the depth and genuinity of the metaphysical reflection on the nature of authorship through the agency of detection. This is so because Quinn and other author-characters in *City of Glass*:

apply the logic of the traditional detective story to their experiences as detectives, and instead realize, in varying degrees, the inadequacy and inaccuracy of the genre's presuppositions. Thus, rather than depicting detectives who invariably attain authorial omniscience, the novel presents author-characters whose experiences return them to the detective's ground-level, fragmented, and imperfect understanding. 36

Consequently, Auster's aim behind *City of Glass* is to call into question the presuppositions of the traditional detective novel, in which the detective aspires to and achieves a perspective above or beyond the case because the impulse to establish order and certainty in Auster's author-detective characters backfires, instead generating disorder and anxiety for the positivistic detective.

The critic Jeffrey Nealon highlights the importance of this connection between writing and the process of detection in *City of Glass* when read in the context of detective fiction. Nealon believes that Auster's novel shows the pains of the author and his struggle with his material in a vein similar to that of the detective. Although the author is the one who establishes the labyrinthine plot into which the reader must enter, s/he is also 'the one who searches – perhaps more desperately than the reader – for its end, for [to quote *City of Glass*] "the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them."'37 'For the reader', Nealon writes, 'the mystery always ends, regardless of whether it is solved. . . . No such luxury is available to the writer or the detective. Once they enter the space of the mystery, there is no guarantee of an ordered conclusion – no guarantee even of the closure afforded the reader by the final period placed after the final sentence.'38 The detective typically faces apparently random and unconnected phenomena in the form of a mystery like a death and a range of clues. He works in a pattern similar to that of the novelist. Both proceed to show that these apparently chance elements link together into a meaningful narrative which can uncover the motives and plots to commit the crime, and the identity of the mysterious criminal.

Basing upon this hypothesis, the critic Bran Nicol finds this process highlighted in the case of Quinn the author-detective. He contends that:

Quinn's engagement with the Stillman case is actually a dramatization of the act of writing, of trying to make some kind of narrative sense out of the chaos of the world. As with other examples of metafiction, Auster's strategy here is to make the metaphorical literal – more precisely, in the case of City of Glass, the analogy between writing and detective-work. For Quinn, in fact, these activities become more than analogous but progressively indistinguishable from one another. 39

This process starts when Quinn has purchased his red notebook. He becomes obsessed with recording everything Stillman does, to the point at which he takes to writing while actually following him, making notes while walking. This betrays traces of the postmodern ironic discourse in that "the very job Quinn took on to escape a purely textual world has ultimately entailed returning to it more directly and desperately than ever."40

Auster further extends his interrogation of the nature of authorship and the textualization of the author through the agency of detection by way of incorporating such poststructuralist tactics as metafictionality, intertextuality and parody. The metafictional dimenaion of *City of Glass* lies in the fact that Quinn is a writer of detective fiction, masquerading as Paul Auster – someone, moreover who writes under the nom-de-plume William Wilson, the name of a character in an Edgar Allan Poe story who is the narrator's uncanny double. Auster incorporates metafictional potential of this scenario to

destabilize ontological boundaries between fiction and reality for reading Auster's name in the story makes us question whether Auster is really the novelist or whether the story is not fiction but true.

In the interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory , Auster discusses the function Paul Auster's appearance serves in *City of Glass*. Auster declares that his cameo appearance is geared to initiate an exploration in the nature of the process of writing and the foundation of authorship. Such an appearance then stems from a desire to illuminate his writing process:

What I was hoping to do, in effect، was to take my name off the cover and put it inside the story. I wanted to open up the process, to break down walls, to expose the plumbing. 41

What Auster is trying to achieve here is to give the reader an insight in the mechanics of writing *City of Glass*.

Auster's appearance in his text as a character is also calculated to advance the plot line of the novel. He helps Quinn break down the Stillman case. When Quinn reaches a dead end in his investigation of the Stillman case he finally looks to Auster for answers to the questions he has about the case . Quinn, we are told:

began at the beginning and went through the entire story, step by step. . . When he had come to the end, he said, Do you think I m crazy? No, said Auster, who had listened attentively to Quinn s monologue. If I had been in your place, I probably would have done the same thing. These words came as a great relief to Quinn, as if, at long last, the burden was no longer his alone. He felt like taking Auster in his arms and declaring his friendship for life. (*City of Glass*:113)

This meeting brings the metafictional aspect of *City of Glass* to a culmination. Quinn meets 'Auster', complete with the author's real-life wife and son, and discusses with him the question of authorship in *Don Quixote*. He explains to Quinn that Don Quixote "orchestrated the whole thing himself," Auster tells Quinn, duping Cervantes into "hiring Don Quixote to decipher the story of Don Quixote himself" (*City of Glass*:153–54).This proves to be an important clue to understanding City of Glass. Alison Russell observes that "In many ways, *City of Glass* is a reworking of Don Quixote, a book that also denies its own authority while claiming to be a true story." (*City of Glass*:101) *City of Glass* contains many references to Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. These intertextual references range from the obvious, such as Daniel Quinn's initials and Paul Auster's theory concerning the authorship of the book, to the obscure, such as the name of Stillman Jr's nurse, Mrs Saavedra, whose husband supposedly recommended the detective Paul Auster to the Stillmans as Saavedra was Cervantes's family name. Quinn becomes a sort of a quixotic hero lost in his text. Auster's analysis, when applied to *City of Glass*, Russell concludes, "raises a number of questions about the book's authorship, and results in endless doublings and mirror images."42 Russell bases her conclusion on the subsequent brief meeting between Quinn and Auster's young son, also named Daniel. Quinn tells the boy, "I'm you, and you're me." The boy replies, "and around and around it goes" (*City of Glass*:157).

However, *Don Quixote* is only one small part of the web of intertextual references in *City of Glass* which includes, among other things, references to such writers as Melville and Hammett. This network of intertextual references in the novel helps extend the metafictional dimension of Auster's story, emphasizing that this is a novel about novels and the act of writing rather than anything in the 'real' world.

The metafictional and intertextual dimensions of *City of Glass* are further complemented with parody in the form of pun. Aliki Varvogli pin points the exact nature of the way Auster fashions Quinn as a postmodernist detective figure when he observes that " throughout *City of Glass*, Auster relies on the pun 'private eye/private "I"' to draw attention to the process of generating meaning."43 This pun is used to foreground the generic conventions of the detective fiction with a metaphysical questioning of selfhood and identity. The shift from 'eye' to 'I' is a shift of character-type from a detective figure into a philosopher one. *City of Glass* speaks eloquently to this point:

Private eye. The term held a triple meaning for Quinn. Not only was it the letter ‘i’, standing for ‘investigator’, it was ‘I’ in the upper case, the tiny lifebud buried in the body of the breathing self. At the same time, it was also the physical eye of the writer, the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him. For five years now, Quinn had been living in the grip of this pun. (*City of Glass*: 8–9)

Indeed, Quinn pretends to be the private eye, but as the story progresses it "becomes increasingly clear that the novel is mainly concerned with his ‘I’; the emphasis shifts from action to introspection, from detective story to the existential, or metaphysical، novel.44

This should explain why *City of Glass* boosts no real crime to be solved by the detective as the latter is busy exploring the conditions of his existence. Indeed, there is no crime in the real sense of the word that ever happened in the novel. Virginia and Peter Stillman only anticipate a crime that did not really take place. They are suspect, with no real reason, that Peter's father is planning to murder his son upon his release from prison. The murder did not happen and certainly shall not. This is a violation of what happens in the classic detective fiction often begins with a crime and what must be discovered is a motive. Quinn is doing things visa versa as he is technically investigating a motive without a crime. Detection is a confusing enough business for Quinn. A good example of the confusion that Quinn is caught in is he initial mystery, the whereabouts of Stillman. Quinn has trouble distinguishing between two remarkably similar men, both of whom could be Stillman, in the confusion of people and trains in Grand Central Station. But Auster entangles Quinn and the reader even further in ever changing and ever deepening mysteries. Most importantly, Quinn departs from the classic detective model in that he never solves the mystery. He himself becomes the mystery.

He, actually, becomes engulfed by mystery and irrationality thereby depriving the reader from the agency of discovery and illumination that the classic detective fiction focalizes in the figure of the detective. The disintegration of the detective in the *City of Glass* leaves the text decentered and in a state of constant deferral. This is nowhere evident than in the case of Quinn’s ultimate disappearance from the text which leaves the reader without a solution and without a center. Towards the ending of the novel Quinn decides to watch the Stillmans apartment when Peter Stillman, Sr. disappears from the hotel where he lived after his release from prison. Quinn takes a post in front of the apartment and disguises as a beggar. Long monthes passes with no one entering or leaving the apartment. He is finally forced to face the Stillmans when he eventually realizes that he can't stay like that for ever. However, he finds that the apartment is quite empty. He is shocked to discover that the cheaques given to him by Virginia Stillman are faked. He goes to his old apartment but finds his things gone and the apartment is rented by other people. Struck by despair, he goes to the empty apartment of the Stillmans. What happens to him in the apartment brings the mystery of the novel to new extremes:

Quinn put the red notebook on the floor, removed, the deaf mute’s pen from his pocked, and tossed it onto the red notebook. Then he took off his watch and put it in his pocket. After that he took off all his clothes, opened the window, and one by one dropped each thing down the airshaft: first his right shoe, then his left shoe; one sock, then the other sock; his shirt, his jacket, his underpants, his pants. He did not look out to watch them fall, nor did he check to see where they landed. Then he closed the window, lay down in the center of the floor, and went to sleep. (*City of Glass*: 193-194)

He languishes and suffers hallucinations. Strange shadows leave him food but he does not bother to look at them or thank them. He eats and write in his red notebook while lying on the ground naked. The scene becomes surrealistic and phantasmal as darkness grows proportionately with the dwindling of the pages of the red notebook. Writing measures his life span and determines his very existence via the correlation of his being with the red notebook which turns from a mere detective's notebook into a textual agency for the materialization of Quinn's sense of selfhood. Quinn, however, tries to:

face the end of the red notebook with courage. He wondered if he had it in him to write without a pen, if he could learn to speak instead, filling the darkness with his voice, speaking the words into the air, into the walls, into the city, even if the light never came back again. The last sentence of the red notebook reads: "What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?" (*City of Glass*:129)

This is a self-reflexive ending. Quinn, the fictional character, disappears once the words run out, i.e. , once the author has stopped writing him into textual existence. Quinn simply disappears. He physically vanishes in the abyss of language like a dissolved self. This defies closure as the narrator of the novel himself admits: "At this point the story grows obscure. The information has run out, and the events that follow this last sentence will never be known. It would be foolish even to hazard a guess." (*City of Glass*:129) Such an open-end does not only rule out any possibilities of closure but also deconstruct the stability of the detective fiction genre by playing on reader's expectations of the classic detective genre.

Auster focuses the reader's attention on the end of the text by employing the form of the classic detective novel. *City of Glass* defies the genre expectations of reader's response in its lack of closure. In the classic detective fiction the reader is geared towards an ultimate closure at the end of the narrative where mystery is solved leaving the reader with a complete feelings of satisfaction. *City of glass* leaves the reader in profound loss as it concludes offering any solution to the mysteries and, in fact, closes the book with more questions than he/she had at the beginning. The narrator coda after the unexplained disappearance of Quinn is calculated to disseminate meaning through the dislocation of the dynamics of textual closure by detracting from the conventional value the reader places in end-motivation of the text. This dislocation is but one step in the constant deferral of the meaning of the text which is the form of the ultimate solution of the mystery. Because this formal resolution is really the center of the text, its deliberate removal destabilizes not only the generic boundaries of the detective fiction but also destabilizes the reader's phenomenological world-view of the 'real' and 'fictional.'

However, being an author is not the only dimension for Auster's detective in *City of Glass*. His detectives, in the other two parts of the Trilogy, are readers also. The critic John Zilcosky contends that " each of Auster's novels features a detective who literally reads the manuscripts of his criminals…Auster's reader-detectives are, dependent, often desperately so, on their criminals. Each reads carefully his criminal's books and notebooks."46 Quinn turns his criminal's daily excursions in New York into texts. He, then, refigures these excursions in his red notebook and reads them as letters in the alphabet. When Stillman, Jr. disappears in the last part of the novel a space is provided for Quinn the reader-detective to reborn in a newly liberated detective. However, the text recoils causing a reversal in this process of re-birth. Quinn, instead, devolves into a deranged vagabond.

The Stillman case gives Quinn a sense of identity through the status of the detective. Detection becomes a telescoping of the two basic agencies associated with the literary text: writing and reading. Reading and being a reader, however, transcend writing and being a writer. He gives up writing mystery novels to read Stillman's cryptic books and follow him all over New York. He even reads his criminal's movements as texts in search or a meaningful pattern:

It seemed to him that he was looking for a sign. He was ransacking the chaos of Stillman's movements for some glimmer of cogency. This implied only one thing: that he continued to disbelieve the arbitrariness of Stillman's actions. He wanted there to be a sense to them, no matter how obscure. (*City of Glass*:69)

After all the detective is a reader who reads for signs and evidences to solve a mystery. This position of the detective as reader conforms with Tzvetan Todorov's homology in 'The Typology of Detective Fiction': 'author : reader=criminal : detective'46 The detective, according to this formula, does not only identify with the reader's pursuit for closure but actually becomes a reader on his own.

Furthermore, Auster's detective is fashioned as reader to bring in a language theme as a further reflection on the problematic nature of authorship and readership as well in the postmodernist era. The

"Tower of Babel" episode towards the end of *City of Glass* is agentive for this end. Quinn writes Stillman's wanderings in New York streets as letters of the alphabet. Once he pieces them together the phrase "Tower of Babel" figures. The Biblical story of the Tower of Babel equates the fall of man with the fall of language. The eraction and ultimate destruction of this tower symbolizes man's loss of the Adamic tongue. Man is no longer able to attach words to their references. Stillman himself evocates this fall and works hard to reverse it in his argument, under the guise of the seventeenth-century clergyman Henry Dark, in his treatises on the Tower of Babel and the fall of language it involved:

If the fall of man also entailed the fall of language, was it not logical to assume that it would be possible to undo the fall, to reverse its effects by undoing the fall of language, by striving to recreate the language that was spoken in Eden? (*City of Glass*:76)

Stillman believes that by recovering the first language of Adam in Eden the world can be restored to its original state before the fall. This is intimately connected with the metaphysical quest of the detective as reader in *City of Glass*. Caught in the metaphysical workings of the detective story, Quinn, the detective-reader, is in a stasis "because clues and the things they point to, signifier and signified, no longer match up." 47 stillman, therefore, embarks on a life-long project to repossess this prelapsarian tongue. Thus, "by giving things their right names again, calling back to its signifier the wandering signified, he finally will be able to achieve a reliable reading of the world and formulate, once and for all, the correct, clear, accessible, and unified text of reality." 48 Auster's incorporation of this metaphysical project in his narrative mirrors the author's struggle against the logos of language to represent meaning or its trace in a fallen world. This necessitate a re-writing of the conventions of genre and identity as they exist in language only. Quinn re-write Stillman's apparently aimless wanderings into the alphabet and the latter gives new names to the garbage he collects in New York city. In both cases detection becomes an agency to heal the fissure between word and object, speaker and utterance. Only then mystery dissipates as existence re-assume its originary state. The world is refashioned in an entirely new set of signs that requires the reader a liberated and fresh awareness that transcends the ontological certainties and boundaries of the post fall world and the incompatible linguistic medium for its representation in textuality. *City of Glass* as a text develops a self-reflexive awareness of its textuality in such a way as to question the very foundations of its existence as a piece of linguistic mediation. Major among these foundations is the generic identity of the text as a detective novel. The critic Malcolm Bradbury puts this more eloquently when he writes of Auster's politics in *City of Glass*:

to explore the world as a labyrinthine and confused text is still to explore it in some fashion; to reconstruct memory, to master solitude, to find good fortune in the random, to discover the living reflection of things, is to engage in the true act of detection for which the writer is responsible, the detection, out of chaos, of story itself, and ultimately perhaps of reality. 49

The ultimate effect of this textual tactics of fashioning the detective as a reader\author, lost in the logos of language and textuality, is to liberate the reader from the confines of traditional detective fiction. Detective fiction is typically condemned as an inferior generic form of writing. But its postmodern incarnation in the Metaphysical Detective Novel forces the reader into a reconsideration of it as a genre which is naturally metafictional and which forces the reader to meditate on the practices of writing and reading fiction.

Notes

1. Bran. Nicol, The *Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009) , p.171.

2. Stuart Sim, *Postmodernism*(London: Routledge, 2001) , p.126.

3. Madeleine Sorapure, "The Detective and the Author: City of Glass," in Denis Barone, ed. *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster* (Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) , p.72.

4. Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, "The Game Afoot: On the Trail of Metaphysical Detective Story," in Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, eds. *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p.2.

5. Ibid.

6. Norma Rowen, "The Detective in Search of the Lost Tongue of Adam: Paul Auster's *City of Glass*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 32, no. 4 (Summer 1991), p.224.

7. Stefano Tani, *The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian Fiction* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984) , p.40.

8. Ibid. , p.43.

9. Ibid.

10. Larry N. Landrum, *American Mystery and Detective Novels : A Reference Guide.* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), pp.43-44.

11. Tani, p.42.

12. Ibid. , p.43.

13. Landrum, p.44.

14.Tani, p.43.

15. Ibid. , p.47.

16. Ibid. , p.30.

17. Ibid.

18. As quoted in Tani, p. 36.

19. Steven E. Alford, "Mirrors of Madness: Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*." *Critique* 37.1 (1995), p.18.

20. Richard Swope, “Approaching the Threshold(s) in Postmodern Detective Fiction: Hawthorne’s ‘Wakefield’ and Other Missing Persons.” *Critique*. 39.3 (1998), pp.211-12.

21. Nathaniel Hawthorne , “ Wakefield ,” in Brian Harding, ed. *Young Goodman Brown and Other Tales* (Oxford : Oxford University Press , 1987), p.133.

22. Mark Brown, "Paul Auster: Poet of Solitude," David Seed, ed. *A Companion to Twentieth-Century United States Fiction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.m 532.

23. Paul Auster, *Ghosts* in *The New York Trilogy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), pp.147-8. Subsequent references to *The New York Trilogy* made in this paper shall be cited in the text of the paper with the title of the part quoted only.

24. As quoted in Zilcosky, John. “The Revenge of the Author: Paul Auster’s Challenge to Theory.” *Critique* 39.3 (1998), p.196.

25. William G. Little,”Nothing to Go on: Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*.” *Contemporary Literature* 38 (1997), p.133.

26. Paul Auster, “Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory.” in *The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1992.), p.262.

27. Mennick, John, *The Detective* (June 5th, 2003) online at http://www.johnmennick.com/archives/000003.php retrieved 14/3/2005

28. Sim, p.126.

29. John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p.141.

30. William Lavender, “The Novel of Critical Engagement: Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*.” *Contemporary Literature* 34.2 (1993), p.219.

31. Alison Russell, "Deconstructing The New York Trilogy: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction," in Harold Bloom, ed., *Paul Auster* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2004), p.82.

32. Lavender, p.219.

33. Brendan Martin, *Paul Auster's Postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 106.

34. Ibid.

35. Sorapure, p.73.

36. Ibid.

37. Jeffrey T. Nealon, “Work of the Detective, Work of the Writer: Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 42. 1 (1996), p.118.

38. Ibid.

39. Nicol, p.181.

40. Ibid.

41. Paul Auster, "Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory," p.308.

42. Russell, p.101.

43. Aliki Varvogli, *The World That Is the Book: Paul Auster's Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001) , p.38.

44. Russell, p.100.

45. Zilcosky, p. 196.

46. Tzvetan Todorov, "The Typology of Detective Fiction." *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977), p. 49.

47. Rowen, p.228.

48. Ibid.

49. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 260.

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